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Assistance in mine action

Letter dated 24 May 2004 from the Permanent Representative of China to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to inform you that a workshop on humanitarian mine/unexploded ordnance clearance technology and cooperation was held from 26 to 28 April 2004 in Kunming City, Yunnan Province, China. The workshop was co-sponsored by the Department of Arms Control and Disarmament of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China, the Australian Network of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines and the China Arms Control and Disarmament Association.

This workshop brought together government officials and demining experts from mine-affected Asian countries and mine-action donor countries, as well as representatives from international organizations and non-governmental organizations involved in landmine issues. The workshop has facilitated constructive discussion of demining technology and experiences.

I should be most grateful if you would circulate the present letter and the Chairs' summary of the workshop annexed to it as a document of the General Assembly under agenda item 22.

(*Signed*) **Wang** Guangya
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Annex to the letter dated 24 May 2004 from the Permanent Representative of China to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Humanitarian Mine/Unexploded Ordnance Clearance Technology and Cooperation Workshop

CHAIRS' SUMMARY

(Kunming, China, April 27, 2004)

A Workshop on Humanitarian Mine/UXO Clearance Technology and Cooperation was held from 26 to 28 April 2004 in Kunming City, Yunnan Province, China. This historic meeting was the first international meeting on humanitarian landmine/UXO clearance held in China.

The meeting was co-sponsored by the Department of Arms Control and Disarmament of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China, the Australian Network of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines, and the China Arms Control and Disarmament Association (CACDA). Mr Fu Cong, Deputy Director General of the Department of Arms Control and Disarmament of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China and Dr David Johnson of the Australian Network of the ICBL acted as Joint Chairs of the workshop.

Delegates were aware that landmines and unexploded munitions still affect 82 countries globally, and kill or injure over 15,000 people every year. Landmines were used extensively in the past in the Asian region. The legacy of these weapons places a huge cost on the people and communities of affected countries, and can be a major reason people are trapped in poverty.

This workshop brought together government officials and de-mining experts from Asian mine-affected countries and mine action donor countries as well as representatives from international organizations and NGOs involved in landmine issues.

In addition to the host country, China, the meeting was attended by eight mine-affected countries – Afghanistan, Cambodia, Eritrea, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Tajikistan, Thailand and Vietnam, and five mine-free countries which have traditionally given aid for mine action - Australia, Canada, France, Switzerland and the USA.

Eight international or non-government organisations which are involved in demining and mine action attended the workshop - The Australian Network of the ICBL, the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining (GICHD), the China Arms Control and Disarmament Association (CACDA), Handicap International – Belgium (HI-B), the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL), the Mines Action Group (MAG), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS), and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP).

At the opening ceremony, statements were made by Mr TONDRUB WANGBUM, Assistant Governor of Yunnan Province China, by Ambassador Li Dayou, President of CACDA, by Mr Liu Jieyi, Director General of the Arms Control and Disarmament Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China, and by Dr David Johnson of the Australian Network of International Campaign to Ban Landmines. All recognised the need to address the continuing humanitarian crisis caused by landmines and unexploded munitions.

The ICBL noted that its goals focus on humanitarian consequences of the use of antipersonnel landmines: mine clearance for the safety of the people, assistance to victims and survivors, destruction of stockpiles to prevent their causing future injuries, and signing of the Mine Ban Convention by all countries.

The resilience, courage and efforts of the landmine survivors, often the poorest in affected countries, call for matching effort and creativity from those of us participating in this workshop.

Canada and Thailand co-chaired a session which heard overviews of mine clearance technologies and experiences in Cambodia, China, Laos, Sri Lanka Tajikistan and Vietnam. Countries in the region stressed the importance of coordination, surveying and planning in dealing with the complexities of mine action. These presentation highlighted the wide range of munitions and environments encountered during mine clearance.

Cambodia and Switzerland co-chaired a session which discussed methodologies and training in mine clearance.

Mechanical devices are used in combination with electronic and dog programmes in order to

1) safely clear vegetation prior to manual demining,
2) speed up area reduction,
3) verify areas believed to be mine-free are actually free
4) conduct quality assurance of land cleared manually
5) and in some cases as a primary clearance tool

In planning and funding mine action programmes operators should take care to choose mechanical devices that are appropriate and cost effective in the environment. Criteria and measurement of relevant results should be collected for the use of mechanical tools in each country.

China then presented a detailed case study of its demining assistance program in Eritrea, and a representative from Eritrea described the landmine/UXO situation and the positive contribution made by China.

France and Sri Lanka co-chaired a session covering perspectives on working with mine-affected communities. There were presentations by the UNMAS on the International Mine Action Standards and also by China on its Mine Clearance Standards, followed by fruitful exchanges. The point was made that community liaison is a two-way system to bridge the divide between mine affected communities and mine action operators. This liaison benefits both parties.

Australia and China co-chaired the session which discussed international collaboration in mine action in Asia. Perspectives on the provision of resources for mine action were given by Australia, Canada, China, France, Switzerland, the USA and Vietnam.

The issue of village demining was discussed noting the benefits of low cost and setting of local priorities must be balanced by ensuring the quality and safety of the clearance operations. The fact that village demining continues is a reflection of the scale of the demining task remaining and the time local people have had to wait for clearance to be done.

Following the two days of technical presentations and discussions, the delegates viewed with interest an exhibition of China's demining technology and equipment.

The Co-Chairs of the workshop observed the following general themes :

- Participants regarded mine/UXO clearance and victim assistance as key elements in addressing the humanitarian concerns in mine-affected countries. International donors need to take account of the individual requirements and specific conditions of different countries.

- A wide range of demining technologies was described, including mechanical, explosive and manual practices.

- All recognised the need to increase the efficiency of mine/UXO clearance operations, bearing in mind the need to undertake clearance as quickly as possible, yet ensuring adequate quality control. They wish to explore ways to enhance co-operation between different mine action parties in ways which take advantage of the different skills, expertise and resources of various countries and organizations.

- It was widely expressed that demining be part of comprehensive programs of mine action including mine risk education, victim assistance and community reconstruction, and the building of local capacities. They also stressed the urgent need to strengthen international efforts in this regard and ensure the projects contribute to development goals. These programs must be conducted with community liaison to ensure they are realistic and pragmatic, so that mine action operations match the local conditions and the needs of the communities.

This meeting notes the potential for further collaborative meetings and actions to build trust and to develop improved mine action practices.

In particular the meeting:

1. Encourages further regional co-operation between the countries in the Asian region, international organisations and NGOs on common issues such as technical matters, operating procedures and development of standards. As part of this we encourage technical exchanges between countries to see each other's work in practice.

2. Encourage countries to consider ways that multiple-party co-operation projects could be undertaken.

3. Encourage involvement and input of all interested countries in the Review process of the International Mine Action Standards.

4. Continue to encourage non-signatory countries to attend meetings of the State Parties to the Mine Ban Convention to foster ongoing dialogues.

The Kunming workshop has facilitated constructive discussion of de-mining technology and experiences. Delegates enjoyed the hospitality of China and the friendly atmosphere of the workshop, where many exchanges of views were made.

There was agreement that the proceedings of this workshop should be shared with all interested parties. We look forward to future meetings and collaboration.